

# Resilience in a Troubled World

Proceedings of the Malta International Theological Conference III



**JOHN ANTHONY BERRY**  
EDITOR

# **Resilience in a Troubled World**

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# Guardini's Concept of 'Living Unity' in the Context of the Liturgical Act

Mariella Catania

*In order for the liturgy to fulfil its formative and transforming function, it is necessary that the pastors and the laity be introduced to their meaning and symbolic language, including art, song and music in the service of the mystery celebrated, even silence.<sup>1</sup>*

Nearly one hundred years ago, precisely in 1922, Romano Guardini had already felt the need to help the faithful in their understanding and appreciation of the liturgy when he published his book *Von Heiligen Zeichen* (Sacred Signs) in which he reflects upon, and explains, various signs, symbols and gestures present in liturgical celebrations. Be it the symbolism of candles, or the meaning of the altar, Guardini made his reflections accessible to all those who wished to understand more of the mysteries of our faith as expressed in the liturgy.

One of the objects that Guardini discusses in *Sacred Signs* is Church doors, which he views as being a reminder of an outer world that is being left behind in order to enter an inner one. The adjectives he uses to describe the outer world (ugly, base, profane) are opposed to his description of the inner world as a silent, consecrated and holy one.

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<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Address to the Participants at the Plenary Assembly of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments*, 14 February 2019, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/february/documents/papa-francesco\\_20190214\\_cong-culto-divino.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2019/february/documents/papa-francesco_20190214_cong-culto-divino.html)

Doors are thus not only a reminder of the difference between these two worlds but also what separates them, encouraging the believer to leave behind ‘thoughts, wishes and cares which are out of their place.’<sup>2</sup> This reflection could make one believe that the experience inside the sacred space is one that cuts him off from the realities left behind in the ‘outer,’ ‘profane’ and ‘unholy’ world and, in light of this, how can a ‘living unity’ between these two worlds be achieved?

Ivica Zizic in a presentation on the symbolism of Church doors,<sup>3</sup> reflects upon how the ritual passage from the profane to the sacred is like an *indispensable* condition in accessing the world of the sacred. He notes how passing through the church door, is a rite in itself, the first act by which the sacred space ritualizes the body and initiates man into a new, divine, reality.<sup>4</sup> This means that rather than leaving a part of him behind, the believer is asked to place this part at the service of the divine reality he is now entering. This thought is articulated in an eloquent way by Heinz R. Kuehn<sup>5</sup> (1919-2006) whose encounter with Guardini was a personal one and is described in these words:

He was a person who by his words and actions drew us into a world where the sacred became convincingly and literally tangible (...) With him on the altar, the sacred table became the centre of the universe. But was it a universe of fantasy? Of escape? Or religious sentiment that did not survive for 24 hours? Or was it the centre of our universe, our daily reality? (...) And yet for us, we found the foothold that gave us the strength and courage to face, to endure and to resist a world in which the forces of evil, Satan and his demons, were running rampant, in that small chapel in the presence of a man whose words and actions made truth appear to us as a physical presence.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Romano Guardini, *The Sacred Signs*, trans. Grace Branham (St. Louis, Missouri: Pio Decimo Press, 1955), 37-40.

<sup>3</sup> Ivica Zizic, *Varcare la soglia. Il simbolismo della porta. Antropologia – Liturgia – Cultura* (paper presented during an event concurrent with the new bronze door competition for the Chiesa Madre di Noci 8 June 2017)

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>5</sup> Romano Guardini, *The Essential Guardini*, ed. Heinz R. Kuehn (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8. Romano Guardini himself confirms that this is indeed what he wanted to do in St. Benedict’s chapel in his *Berichte ueber mein Leben* which appeared posthumously. In this book he writes how during the liturgical celebration his intention was ‘to make the truth glow.’

What has been left at the chapel/church/sacred space's door finds itself again in the sacred space. This is also evident in Christianity's early years where we do not just find a door but also the four-sided portico and, later, the cloister, which were places that recalled the perfect harmony between heaven and earth. They provided a space for communion, regeneration and unity.<sup>7</sup> Walking through the door, portico or cloister is thus an initiation into the ritual celebration, one that already involves man's whole being – body and spirit – with the aim of seeing Jesus, the truth.

### **The Liturgical Act as Comprising the Material and the Spiritual**

Guardini's rediscovery of the liturgy, in the words of Benedict XVI is 'a rediscovery of the oneness of spirit and flesh in the totality of the single human being, since liturgical action is always at the same time both bodily and spiritual.'<sup>8</sup> Liturgy is symbolic action and 'the symbol as the quintessence of the oneness of the spiritual and the material is lost when these separate, when the world is split in half, into spirit and flesh, into subject and object.'<sup>9</sup> Symbolic action unites these polarities and since man is *spirit in flesh* and *flesh in spirit*, Liturgy leads him 'to the essence of himself and ultimately, through worship, to the truth.'<sup>10</sup>

This, however, implies an understanding of the liturgical action and Guardini writes how despite being surrounded by the signs of the times and of the liturgy, modernity has paved the way for their decay and they have been emptied of their meaning.<sup>11</sup> This is echoed in a reflection by Enrico Grassini who writes how modern and contemporary man has been "'de-symbolised' by an increasing lack of trust towards the concrete, the bodily and the perceptible by the senses."<sup>12</sup>

Towards the end of his life, Guardini was still preoccupied with this issue and in 1964, in a letter written to the participants in the Third German Liturgical Congress in Mainz, he poses the fundamental question: what does the integrated liturgical act consist of? He reflects

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<sup>7</sup> Zizic, *Varcare la soglia*, 4.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Romano Guardini, *Formazione liturgica* (Milano: Morcellana, 1988), 51.

<sup>12</sup> Enrico Grassini, *Conoscenza e sensibilità in Romano Guardini*, educare all'armonia del sangue e dello spirito, 5 [https://www.academia.edu/31472648/CONOSCENZA\\_E\\_SENSIBILIT%C3%81\\_IN\\_ROMANO\\_GUARDINI](https://www.academia.edu/31472648/CONOSCENZA_E_SENSIBILIT%C3%81_IN_ROMANO_GUARDINI).

upon a personal experience he once had in a cathedral in Monreale, in which he witnessed something that he feels we have lost, ‘the capacity to live-in-the-gaze, to remain in vision, to receive the sacred from the form and from the event, contemplating’<sup>13</sup> In Monreale Guardini realised how ‘the liturgical act can be realised by looking’<sup>14</sup> with the sense of vision meaning not only taking note of what is going on in front but is itself a living participation in the liturgical act. He further believes that only if regarded in this way can the liturgical-symbolical action be properly understood.<sup>15</sup>

With this contemplative *looking* that accompanies performative activities or *doings*<sup>16</sup> it is not even necessary to add words to explain what is taking place, but rather ‘the symbol should be “done” by the celebrant as a religious act and the faithful should “read” it by an analogous act’<sup>17</sup> thus seeing the inner sense in the outward sign. “The symbol is in itself something corporal-spiritual, an expression of the inward through the outward, and must as such be co-performed through the act of looking.”<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to note how Pope Benedict XVI remembers Guardini using ‘you see...’ as one of his keywords ‘because he wanted to guide us to ‘seeing.’<sup>19</sup> The Pope Emeritus, however, points to the fact that one does not always comprehend what God says and this necessitates ‘interpretation’ which he believes consists of ‘an exchange with others that down the ages has found its most reliable form in the living Church which unites all people.’<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Romano Guardini, *Settimana Santa a Monreale*, accessed 2 April 2019, [http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/49404.html?refresh\\_ce](http://chiesa.espresso.repubblica.it/articolo/49404.html?refresh_ce).

<sup>14</sup> Corpus Christi Watershed, *1964 Letter from Romano Guardini*, accessed 2 April 2019, <http://www.ccwatershed.org/blog/2013/sep/5/1964-letter-romano-guardini/>.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> David A. Stosur, “Liturgy and (Post)Modernity: A Narrative Approach to Guardini’s challenge,” *Worship* 77 (2003): 31.

<sup>17</sup> Corpus Christi Watershed, *1964 Letter from Romano Guardini*, accessed April 2, 2019, <http://www.ccwatershed.org/blog/2013/sep/5/1964-letter-romano-guardini/>.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Address at the Guardini Foundation’s Congress on the Spiritual and intellectual legacy of Romano Guardini*, 29 October 2010, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/october/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20101029\\_fondazione-guardini.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20101029_fondazione-guardini.html).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

### **The Liturgical Act as a Communal Act**

Romano Guardini believes that the action and full participation of the congregation as a body is of a particular importance for the liturgical act and it is in this act the individual becomes conscious of the meaning of the words 'congregation' and 'church.' He is aware that worshippers are at a disadvantage because of modernity's radical individualism and Robert Krieg points out how in 1922, in lectures published as *The Church and the Catholic*, Guardini reflects upon how 'a person's life is healthiest when it unfolds within an appropriate tension or polarity between the individual and the community.'<sup>21</sup> For him, human life is at the same time individual and communal with these two aspects existing side by side: "the communal element exists already as an abiding predisposition in the individual person, and the individual element is already contained in a community. This interconnectedness, occurs without hurting the relative independence of both aspects of human life."<sup>22</sup>

Reflecting upon Guardini's theology of the person, Krieg notes how in Guardini's judgement 'a human being eventually grows tired of standing alone, and when fatigue sets in, the individual soon submits to domination by another human being or an institution (...) autonomy eventually collapses into heteronomy.'<sup>23</sup> This leads to Guardini's belief that 'theonomy is a way of life undertaken within the Church, which itself is called by God to be a community that safeguards and strengthens the distinct, yet interconnected dimensions of a person's life.'<sup>24</sup> Krieg notes how Guardini did not agree with Soren Kierkegaard's view that theonomy requires a wholly private act of faith and maintained rather that Christ is the way to the Father and Christ is properly seen only within the space of the Church, and as oriented by the Holy Spirit. Krieg further quotes Guardini who is firm in his belief that the Church is not identical with a single part of the hierarchy, nor with a particular theological school, or with a predictable way of doing things but is indeed much more than this since beyond every individual part, we

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<sup>21</sup> Robert A. Krieg, "Romano Guardini's Theology of the Human Person," *Theological Studies* 59 (1998): 472.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 472.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 470.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 471.

can find the experience of the Church's totality and essence.<sup>25</sup> Krieg thus concludes that if human beings intent to become whole persons, this demands participation in the community of believers.<sup>26</sup>

This involves a movement from the 'I' to the 'we,' a movement which, however, does not violate personal individuality. Guardini notes how 'Catholic community presupposes from the outset and requires the free individual personalities as its components (...) microcosms revolving on their own axes.'<sup>27</sup> It is only when these units with their own individual centres and life come together that unity can arise and this is what we understand as community.<sup>28</sup> Guardini views this as being a fundamental truth which needs to be understood since unless one grasps it, the Catholic view 'of the church, indeed of society, must be intelligible. We must not get our sociological principles either from communism, state socialism or individualism, for all these tear the living whole to pieces to exaggerate one portion of it.'<sup>29</sup>

Thus in Guardini's view the experience of the individual lived in community aids him in steering away from both autonomy and heteronomy and in letting him be governed by theonomy wherein each woman and man recognizes God as the only absolute authority for human life, 'and in turn the living God will set each human being free to become a whole person, one who is an "I" within "I-thou" relationships.'<sup>30</sup> Guardini also believes that this becomes evident in the liturgical act itself in which one finds the action and full participation of the human congregation as a body. The "we" of prayers is the act done by every individual as a member of a body and not as an isolated self. One is part of a 'corpus,' an 'objective whole' and therein becomes part of this body and incorporates the circumstances in his self-expression.

### **Learning the Liturgical Act**

In an interview published on the 3 November, Arnaud Join-Lambert discusses the fact that nowadays many Catholics steer away from the Church's rites because they do not find meaning in them and feels that

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Romano Guardini, "The Church and the Catholic," in *The Essential Guardini*, ed. Heinz R. Kuehn (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997), 123.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>30</sup> Robert A. Krieg, "Romano Guardini's Theology of the Human Person," 464.

this applies not only to the Church's rituality but to the very sense of it.<sup>31</sup> He notes how the Church possesses a wealth of ritual which is very rich in meaning yet which is not used by people, 'when one doesn't have the codes, symbolic language passes us by. Because of the problem of transmission, most people have not mastered this language.'<sup>32</sup> This concern echoes Guardini's own when in the 1964 letter to the Mainz Congress he emphasises the need for proper instruction and real education with the aim of helping people to rise above reading and writing and learn 'to look with understanding.'<sup>33</sup>

In the famous response to Father Pierre-Marie Gy, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger notes how there is a need for liturgical formation in the form of a real familiarity with the texts and forms of the liturgy. Without such formation, the purely exterior activities remain meaningless and empty but when such formation is present, it 'makes possible a close union of the whole being, of thought and action, to the liturgy.'<sup>34</sup>

## Conclusion

In an address to participants in a conference sponsored by the 'Romano Guardini Stiftung,' Pope Francis expresses his belief that for Guardini the "living unity" with God consists in the 'concrete relationships of individuals with the world and with those around them.'<sup>35</sup> Guardini never forgot the relationship of the church with the society and culture from which its members came. 'He believed that the eternal mysteries of the faith, borne by the tradition of the church's liturgy and teaching, must be held in tension with the interpretation of these mysteries in

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<sup>31</sup> Marie Malzac, "We Have to Make our Liturgies Appealing Again," accessed April 2, 2019, [https://international.la-croix.com/news/we-have-to-make-our-liturgies-appealing-again/8764?utm\\_term=Autofeed&utm\\_medium=Social&utm\\_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwAR0UYwx9ba0fp68VbZhjTw5Wfz4KwR-NjacBcPFDMmyk79R6AOpn01K\\_kdM#](https://international.la-croix.com/news/we-have-to-make-our-liturgies-appealing-again/8764?utm_term=Autofeed&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Facebook&fbclid=IwAR0UYwx9ba0fp68VbZhjTw5Wfz4KwR-NjacBcPFDMmyk79R6AOpn01K_kdM#)

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Corpus Christi Watershed, *1964 Letter from Romano Guardini*, accessed 2 April 2019, <http://www.ccwatershed.org/blog/2013/sep/5/1964-letter-romano-guardini/>.

<sup>34</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, "The Spirit of the Liturgy or Fidelity to the Council: Response to Father Gy," *Antiphon* 11, no.1 (2007): 98.

<sup>35</sup> Pope Francis, *Address to the Participants in the Conference sponsored by the Romano Guardini Stiftung*, 13 November 2015 [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151113\\_romano-guardini-stiftung.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151113_romano-guardini-stiftung.html)

the ever-shifting cultural situation of the post-Holocaust world.<sup>36</sup> Liturgy becomes a primary theology that helps ‘the individual and the community to deepen their baptismal commitment of conversion to Christ, thereby overcoming the detrimental effects of society’s influence on them.’<sup>37</sup> Heinz Kuehn once again points to this reality when he describes his experience of liturgy celebrated by Romano Guardini as being one which gave him and those present:

The sustenance that nourished us for another week of uncertainty, danger and fear, the strength to face Satan and his demons for another week, and that a mere evocation of his presence at the altar and of his words brought light even into our darkest moments of hopelessness or despair.<sup>38</sup>

I started this reflection by mentioning Church doors. In *Sacred Signs* Guardini adds yet another element that Church doors convey. He writes about the fact that on crossing the threshold one unconsciously lifts one’s head and eyes and faces the great interior space of the church. He believes that this helps the person entering through the door experience a similar expansion and enlargement on the inside.

Doors admit us to this mysterious place and invite us not only to lay aside all that cramps and narrows and sinks the mind but also to realize that God’s temple is our own representation, ‘for you, your soul and your body, are the living temple of God.’<sup>39</sup> Doors cry out to us to realize that we ourselves are God’s living dwelling and that the King of Glory cannot enter in lest ‘the high arched gates may be lifted up, and the portals parted wide.’<sup>40</sup> The very first ‘ritual’ – trespassing the Church door is already an invitation for man to embrace the truth by practicing the obedience of his being in relation to the being of God,<sup>41</sup> to humbly accept existence from the hand of God and for personal will to be transformed into divine will. In doing so the created being does not cease to be a created being and God does not cease to be

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<sup>36</sup> David A. Stosur, “Liturgy and (Post)Modernity, 23.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>38</sup> Romano Guardini, *The Essential Guardini*, 8.

<sup>39</sup> Romano Guardini, *The Sacred Signs*, 22.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Pope Benedict XVI, *Address at the Guardini Foundation’s Congress on the Spiritual and intellectual legacy of Romano Guardini*, 29 October 2010, [https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/october/documents/hf\\_ben-xvi\\_spe\\_20101029\\_fondazione-guardini.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2010/october/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20101029_fondazione-guardini.html)



God<sup>42</sup> and this is something which takes place ultimately in worship and which leads to a living unity with oneself and ultimately with God. I would like to conclude with the words of David A. Stosur who in his concluding words to an article on liturgy and (post) modernism says that:

Between the "once upon a time" of the Gardens of Eden and Gethsemane and the "happily ever after" of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb in the New Jerusalem, we will continue to find in the liturgical here-and-now the Author of our life, if only we have the courage to narrate and implicate ourselves in the Story through which we discover our living and true identity.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Pope Francis, Address to the Participants in the Conference sponsored by the Romano Guardini Stiftung 13 November 2015 [https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco\\_20151113\\_romano-guardini-stiftung.html](https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/november/documents/papa-francesco_20151113_romano-guardini-stiftung.html)

<sup>43</sup>David A. Stosur, *Liturgy and (Post)Modernity*, 41.

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